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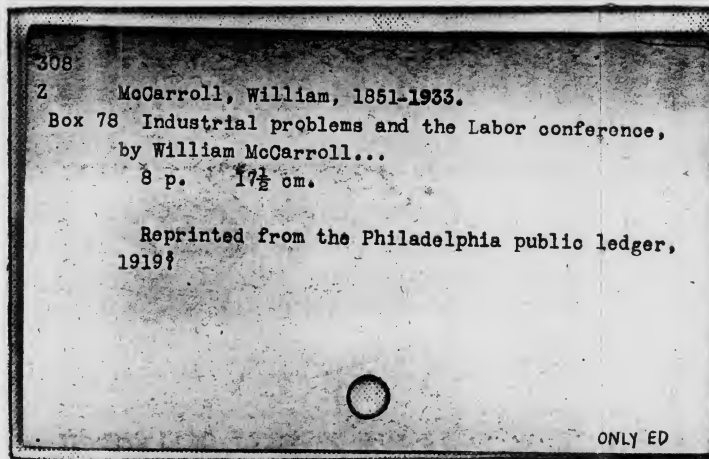
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Gift of the President

Industrial Problems

and the

Labor Conference



BY

WILLIAM MCCARROLL

Former Public Service Commissioner of the State of New York

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The Labor Conference

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INDUSTRIAL PROBLEMS —AND— THE LABOR CONFERENCE

The recent Labor Conference having ended in futility, it may be well to review its efforts and examine the causes of its disappointing end. While crediting the high aims and purposes of President Wilson in calling it, it will not be amiss to consider his address before its close. It was indeed a vacuous message, and it could not be of any weight or effect. It contained no suggestion whatever of any practical or constructive character.

This is nothing less than pitiful when we think of the opportunity, and what he might have succeeded in accomplishing had he had a true view of the so called Labor Problem and the fundamental questions involved in it and had he declared and firmly stood for the only right position regarding them. Big as it is with issues involving the National Welfare, it is made to appear complex and abstruse, and its solution made the more difficult from the singular timidity of our public men and others to fearlessly face and stand on the principles that underlie it. These questions are the overshadowing ones of our time, for our country and for others besides.

The present industrial and social crisis—for it is no less—can be clearly traced as in large degree the logical outcome of the attitude and expressions of the President at home and abroad, and of some in his Administration—a responsibility shared by others of our political or professional so-called leaders.

Doubtless these were well intentioned on the President's part in a benevolent but impractical altruism—tempered with some slant of the political bearings, conscious or unconscious. I refer to the loose talk in such phrases as “the time having come when the people are in the saddle”—the democratization of industries” etc. Coming from the President of the United States, such declarations had the effect of inflaming the minds of the mass of unthinking people. His statements were interpreted, expanded, and exploited by the promoters of discontent and revolution. They took or used them as meaning that the people had been despoiled of some of their rights and

now the time had come when they should assert and claim for themselves control or even possession of the industries. They construed the words of the President, not as he might have intended, as setting forth the better conditions to be constantly held before us and worked towards in the course of progress, but as an encouragement to them to usurp them at once, "peaceably if they could, forcibly if they must."

Possibly the President should not be held wholly responsible if there were misconceptions or misinterpretations of his speeches unwise as they were, but in the conditions existing here and in other countries they were like firebrands and such they have proved.

In this matter of Industrial Relations, as in the League Covenant, the same altruism has brought him, this country and others into the present maze of difficulties which envelopes and threatens all. We can hope to be delivered from disaster only by recognizing and facing the facts and by taking heed to the sober utterances of our clear headed and experienced "men who know." Happily the country has some of them to whom we can look, in this day of superficial thinking and loose talking.

In further tracing some of the causes of the present conditions, we need go no further back than the enactment of the Adamson Bill in the previous Congress. Whatever may be one's opinion of its provisions, it was brought about by "stand and deliver" methods on the part of Trades Union leaders. It was naturally and inevitably followed by the same tactics in the successive demands made and yielded to since, by the Congress and by the President.

On our entrance in the war the administration of our industrial machinery was taken over by the Government. No sooner was this done than the power of the Labor Leaders, already entrenched, was invoked to obtain increases of wages with decreases of work and to enforce favoring regulations. National Commissions, Departments, and Bureaus established seemed to vie with each other as to which could yield the most quickly and grant the most. Admitting that some of this was due to necessities under the emergency, there was little or no regard paid to economy, to the cost of the service or to the public, to the effect in general business conditions, or to the certain result to follow in raising the cost of living. All these are contributing elements in the present conditions of discontent and danger.

Nothing different was to have been expected. But when in due course the extent of these demands became intolerable and impossible, the imperiousness of the Labor leaders, which

had grown with their success in intimidation, likewise became impossible. For by this time it had expanded, so that to-day they assume to dictate the control and operation of our industries, and, if the truth be told, with "Government ownership" as part of the scheme, to control the Government of the country itself. No less than that is even the admitted end of the more radical element.

I do not now charge Mr. Gompers with being actuated by such purposes, though his leaving the Labor Conference with dire threats lays him open to strong suspicion and shows him to incline towards or being driven by the radicals when confronted by the issue.

I do not for a moment believe the American workingmen have insight into this. If they had, swift retribution would come to their leaders. Nor do I believe that such a revolution is possible. But it is necessary to face the facts in order to frustrate the inception. Even our benignant Ex-President Taft seems from some of his more recent statements to begin to apprehend the trend of the movement and whither it leads.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

In all this we see the true reason of Organized Labor's insistence on "Collective Bargaining" **only in their own form.** The National Board of which the Ex-President was Chairman never did a more dangerous and mistaken thing than when it formally declared and imposed the so-called right of "Collective Bargaining." It seems very innocuous under that euphonious but misleading term. To people generally it appeals on its face as a reasonable proposition that workmen should have the right to be represented in negotiating by any they choose, and the Ex-President innocently asks—"Why should they be limited in the choice of those who are to speak for them?" We put the counter question: Why should they not be limited? Why should they want as representatives in negotiations with employers men who are not identified with or without knowledge of the industry, the conditions of which are under discussion? Why should they not be willing and even desirous to be represented by men of their own choice **actually engaged in or conversant with such industry?** The workmen themselves would surely be the last to admit that among the hundreds or thousands of their number in a given trade or in a given plant there are not men of abundant capacity to properly represent them in conference with employers. The employers do not ask to call in conferees from outside to represent them in bargaining. No, the truth is that the "collective bargaining" the labor leaders stand for is not collective bargaining at all. It is **solidarity** they are after.

The purpose of the leaders is that their professional organizers and agitators or others—not working men at all, but men who do not work,—shall be selected and empowered **not to bargain but to demand.** In that way they can impose and fasten control and power over the men they are supposed to represent, but whom their only aim is to make their instruments or tools. What a field for graft is opened up, but beyond that what power for designing men with ulterior or even revolutionary purposes? No wonder these leaders would have no other “collective bargaining” than of their own kind:

But some may say that this danger is unreal, or exaggerated. Assume for argument, that it is not yet tangible enough to be generally seen and felt; but it is evident that the “collective bargaining” so strenuously and unyieldingly contended for creates and carries such dangerous powers. That being so, it is insisted on for no other reason; and if the men now standing for it are not those who will exercise it, the time will not be long in coming when others who will do so shall be put in their places. Therein is the answer to the Ex-President’s question.

THE “CLOSED SHOP”

So this “collective bargaining,” plausible on the surface to the public, was put forward in the beginning of the conference—and in previous discussion—before open demand for the “Closed Shop” to follow.

The two, however, go hand in hand—the one the complement of the other. The former is almost necessary to the latter, especially while the number of workmen in Organized Labor is in so small a minority of the working men of America. The astonishing fact is that this approximately 15% of the workmen of the U. S., known as “Organized Labor” presumes to speak for the workmen of the country, and in this assumption dominates some public men and politicians through fear or threats of a political power they do not really possess. Witness the results of the election just held and others, showing that in the exercise of his franchise, where he has his freedom, the American workman is not controlled by Labor Union Leaders, in his ballot. They cannot yet dominate him in that, though so claiming. Heaven forbid the day when they could!

THE WORKINGMEN OF THE U. S.

It is one of the singular phases of the Labor Conference that the unorganized workmen, (i.e. not in a Labor Union) were not represented at all; yet they number, as indicated, more than 80% of the workmen of the United States. There

was no “group” provided or formed to speak for them; “their voice was not heard” in the Conference.

There is no contention from them for “Collective Bargaining,” or for the “Closed Shop.” They realize that the “Closed Shop” is in its essence a violation of the fundamental principles of American Government and American Life—a continuing menace, as it has been, to our institutions and to our industries. It should not be tolerated as subject for question any more than the right of a man to belong or not to a certain church, or a certain political party.

It is no less a hindrance to the best interest of Trade Unions themselves, whose usefulness in the cause of workmen generally would be vastly augmented by elimination of the false and poisonous doctrine. It is the “root of bitterness” and malcontent. Uproot it and with it goes ground for antagonism. There should be no place in this land where a workman should not have the right to work, whether he belongs to a Trade Union or whether he does not. Judge Gary and others like him, are fighting the battle of American freedom of the individual when standing, as he does of necessity as patriot and employer, on that principle.

The pity of it is that it is left to any one or to any number of private citizens. Fortunately, however, for the country the people are rallying in support. They are beginning to see what is really at stake. The present coal strike, with all its potentialities of evil, now begun in very defiance of the Government itself, and the open threat of refusal to obey a law prohibiting strikes by Railroads and Public Service employees now before Congress, in case of its enactment, are only some of the manifestations of the forces of disorder sought to be united and held under their domination and control by reckless men.

But we ask, why should not the President of the United States, instead of a message of weak appeal to the Conference, have called on all “groups” and members to proceed on the basis of this fundamental right and freedom of the workman to work, whether he belongs to a Trade Union, or not? Doing that, he could have vindicated true Americanism, liberated himself and public men, and the workmen themselves, many of them held unwilling members, from Trades Union domination. He could have taught the Anarchists, Bolsheviks and Communists—the A. B. C’s of revolution and disaster—that here is no place for their subversive and tyrannous activities—and that the United States will remain in “spirit and in truth” the land of the free.

Such a declaration by the President might have made a success instead of a failure of the Conference. It would have

at least forced the issue to the finality which must be reached and soon, and have made the conditions and the responsibility clear.

THE "OPEN SHOP"

The "open shop"—which means only free shops for free men—must be established and upheld as the **basis of American industries**. It is the primal principle of "self determination"—so strenuously contended for by the President as inalienable, for Nations—which is the inherent right of the individual, and as such guaranteed our citizens by the Constitution. It is the sole solution of the problems and conditions which the President laments and from which the country suffers and shall suffer more.

The word and leadership of the President would have been potent, perhaps decisive. But industrial and individual freedom with the "open shop" will be finally secured. Reason, equity and patriotism will prevail, and then, but not till then, can be established those relations of harmony and co-operation which must be brought about to preserve and insure our industrial progress and our National Welfare.

November 23rd, 1919.

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